

The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook

SIMPLE, CONCISE, STEP-BY-STEP DIRECTIONS FOR MASTERY OF:

Progressive Relaxation • Self-Hypnosis • Meditation
Autogenics • Visualization • Refuting Irrational Ideas
Nutrition • Coping Skills Training • Biofeedback • Exercise
Assertiveness • Thought Stopping • Time Management
Breathing • Cue-Controlled Relaxation • Quick Relaxers

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Progressive Relaxation

You cannot have the feeling of warm well-being in your body and at the same time experience psychological stress. Progressive relaxation of your muscles reduces pulse rate and blood pressure as well as decreasing perspiration and respiration rates. Deep muscle relaxation, when successfully mastered, can be used as an anti-anxiety pill.

Edmund Jacobson, a Chicago physician, published the book *Progressive Relaxation* in 1929. In this book he described his deep muscle relaxation technique, which he asserted required no imagination, willpower or suggestion. His technique is based on the premise that the body responds to anxiety-provoking thoughts and events with muscle tension. This physiological tension, in turn, increases the subjective experience of anxiety. Deep muscle relaxation reduces physiological tension and is incompatible with anxiety: The habit of responding with one blocks the habit of responding with the other.

Symptom Relief

Excellent results have been found in the treatment of muscular tension, anxiety, insomnia, depression, fatigue, irritable bowel, muscle spasms, neck and back pain, high blood pressure, mild phobias, and stuttering.

Time for Mastery

One to two weeks. Two fifteen minute sessions per day.

Instructions

Most people do not realize which of their muscles are chronically tense. Progressive relaxation provides a way of identifying particular muscles and muscle groups and distinguishing between sensations of tension and deep relaxation. Four major muscle groups will be covered:

1. Hands, forearms, and biceps
2. Head, face, throat, and shoulders, including concentration on forehead, cheeks, nose, eyes, jaws, lips, tongue, and neck. Considerable attention is devoted to your head, because from the emotional point of view, the most important muscles in your body are situated in and around this region.
3. Chest, stomach, and lower back.
4. Thighs, buttocks, calves, and feet.

Progressive relaxation can be practiced lying down or in a chair with your head supported. Each muscle or muscle grouping is tensed from five to seven seconds and then relaxed for twenty to thirty seconds. This procedure is repeated at least once. If an area remains tense, you can practice up to five times. You may also find it useful to use the following relaxing expressions when untensing:

Let go of the tension.

Throw away the tension—I am feeling calm and rested.

Relax and smooth out the muscles.

Let the tension dissolve away.

Once the procedure is familiar enough to be remembered, keep your eyes closed and focus attention on just one muscle group at a time. The instructions for progressive relaxation are divided into two sections. The first part, which you may wish to tape and replay when practicing, will familiarize you with the muscles in your body which are most commonly tense. The second section shortens the procedure by simultaneously tensing and relaxing many muscles at one time so that deep muscle relaxation can be achieved in a very brief period.

Basic Procedure

Get in a comfortable position and relax. Now clench your right fist, tighter and tighter, studying the tension as you do so. Keep it clenched and notice the tension in your fist, hand, and forearm. Now relax. Feel the looseness in your right hand, and notice the contrast with the tension. Repeat this procedure with your right fist again, always noticing as you relax that this is the opposite of tension—relax and feel the difference. Repeat the entire procedure with your left fist, then both fists at once.

Now bend your elbows and tense your biceps. Tense them as hard as you can and observe the feeling of tautness. Relax, straighten out your arms. Let the relaxation develop and feel that difference. Repeat this, and all succeeding procedures at least once.

Turning attention to your head, wrinkle your forehead as tight as you can. Now relax and smooth it out. Let yourself imagine your entire forehead and scalp becoming smooth and at rest. Now frown and notice the strain spreading throughout your forehead. Let go. Allow your brow to become smooth again. Close your eyes now, squint them tighter. Look for the tension. Relax your eyes. Let them remain closed gently and comfortably. Now clench your jaw, bite hard, notice the tension throughout your jaw. Relax your jaw. When the jaw is relaxed, your lips will

be slightly parted. Let yourself really appreciate the contrast between tension and relaxation. Now press your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Feel the ache in the back of your mouth. Relax. Press your lips now, purse them into an "O." Relax your lips. Notice that your forehead, scalp, eyes, jaw, tongue and lips are all relaxed.

Press your head back as far as it can comfortably go and observe the tension in your neck. Roll it to the right and feel the changing locus of stress, roll it to the left. Straighten your head and bring it forward, press your chin against your chest. Feel the tension in your throat, the back of your neck. Relax, allowing your head to return to a comfortable position. Let the relaxation deepen. Now shrug your shoulders. Keep the tension as you hunch your head down between your shoulders. Relax your shoulders. Drop them back and feel the relaxation spreading through your neck, throat and shoulders, pure relaxation, deeper and deeper.

Give your entire body a chance to relax. Feel the comfort and the heaviness. Now breathe in and fill your lungs completely. Hold your breath. Notice the tension. Now exhale, let your chest become loose, let the air hiss out. Continue relaxing, letting your breath come freely and gently. Repeat this several times, noticing the tension draining from your body as you exhale. Next, tighten your stomach and hold. Note the tension, then relax. Now place your hand on your stomach. Breathe deeply into your stomach, pushing your hand up. Hold, and relax. Feel the contrast of relaxation as the air rushes out. Now arch your back, without straining. Keep the rest of your body as relaxed as possible. Focus on the tension in your lower back. Now relax, deeper and deeper.

Tighten your buttocks and thighs. Flex your thighs by pressing down your heels as hard as you can. Relax and feel the difference. Now curl your toes downward, making your calves tense. Study the tension. Relax. Now bend your toes toward your face, creating tension in your shins. Relax again.

Feel the heaviness throughout your lower body as the relaxation deepens. Relax your feet, ankles, calves, shins, knees, thighs, and buttocks. Now let the relaxation spread to your stomach, lower back, and chest. Let go more and more. Experience the relaxation deepening in your shoulders, arms, and hands. Deeper and deeper. Notice the feeling of looseness and relaxation in your neck, jaws, and all your facial muscles.

Shorthand Procedure

The following is a procedure for achieving deep muscle relaxation quickly. Whole muscle groups are simultaneously tensed and then relaxed. As before, repeat each procedure at least once, tensing each muscle group from five to seven seconds and then relaxing from 15 to 30 seconds. Remember to notice the contrast between the sensations of tension and relaxation.

1. Curl both fists, tightening biceps and forearms (Charles Atlas pose). Relax.
2. Wrinkle up forehead. At the same time, press your head as far back as possible, roll it clockwise in a complete circle, reverse. Now wrinkle up the muscles of your face like a walnut: frowning, eyes squinted, lips pursed, tongue pressing the roof of the mouth, and shoulders hunched. Relax.
3. Arch back as you take a deep breath into the chest. Hold. Relax. Take a deep breath, pressing out the stomach. Hold. Relax.

4. Pull feet and toes back toward face, tightening shins. Hold. Relax. Curl toes, simultaneously tightening calves, thighs and buttocks. Relax.

Special Considerations

1. If you make a tape of the basic procedure to facilitate your relaxation program, remember to space each procedure so that time is allowed to experience the tension and relaxation before going on to the next muscle or muscle group.
2. Most people have somewhat limited success when they begin deep muscle relaxation, but it is only a matter of practice. Whereas twenty minutes of work might initially bring only partial relaxation, it will eventually be possible to relax your whole body in a few moments.
3. Sometimes in the beginning, it may seem to you as though relaxation is complete. But although the muscle or muscle group may well be partially relaxed, a certain number of muscle fibers will still be contracted. It is the act of relaxing these additional fibers that will bring about the emotional effects you want. It is helpful to say to yourself during the relaxation phase, "Let go more and more."
4. Caution should be taken in tensing the neck and back. Excessive tightening can result in muscle or spinal damage. It is also commonly observed that overtightening the toes or feet results in muscle cramping.
5. People new to this technique sometimes make the error of relaxing tension gradually. This slow-motion release of tension may look relaxed, but it actually requires sustained tension. When you release the tension in a particular muscle, let it go instantly, as though you had just turned off an electrical current. Let your muscles become suddenly limp.

Further Reading

Jacobson, Edmund. 1974. *Progressive Relaxation*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprint.

Wolpe, Joseph. 1982. *The Practice of Behavior Therapy*. 3rd ed. New York: Pergamon Press.

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Brief Combination Techniques

The relaxation exercises presented in this chapter are based on the work of many different therapists. They are creative blends of some of the techniques you have already learned about in this book. Learning several brief combination techniques can greatly benefit you for three reasons. First, when you put two or more relaxation approaches together, the combination can have a synergistic effect. This means that the sum relaxation effect of the combined techniques is far greater than what you would achieve if you did each relaxation procedure individually. As you experiment with the material presented in this chapter, you'll learn which techniques are best at activating each other and combining for the most powerful effect. The second reason that combination techniques are often more powerful is because the sequence is set up to draw you deeper into the relaxation experience. Each technique builds progressively upon the one before. For example, the relaxation you experience from visualizing a pleasant beach scene is more profound if you precede the visualization with some deep breathing. And if you follow the deep breathing and the beach scene with autogenic themes of heaviness and warmth, you have a sequence of techniques that build one upon the other toward a deeper relaxation response. The third advantage to using the combination techniques presented in this chapter is their brevity. You can easily do any of these combination sequences during a ten-minute coffee break. Any time you have a few minutes to spare, they can help you center yourself and regain a sense of calmness.

The combination techniques presented here are merely suggestions. While each one has been tested and proven useful, feel free to be inventive. Try your own unique combinations. Experiment with a different sequence. Since you are a unique person with unique needs and patterns of responses, it is important that you add, delete, and modify until you have a brief relaxation sequence that really works for you.

Symptom Relief

The brief combination techniques presented here have been proven effective in the treatment of fight or flight symptoms and stress-induced physiological disorders. They are particularly

helpful when stress is work-related and requires brief but frequent booster sessions during the day to cope with mounting tensions.

Time for Mastery

If you have mastered the component techniques presented in earlier chapters of the book, these combination approaches can be immediately and effectively applied. Otherwise, allow one to two weeks to successfully use these combined approaches.

Instructions

1. *Stretch and Relax*

- A. Take a big stretch. Tighten your arms and pull them back so that you stretch your chest and shoulders. Stretch and tighten your legs at the same time by first pulling your toes up toward you and then pushing them out straight.
- B. Place one hand on your abdomen, just above your belt. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose into your abdomen. Push up your hand as much as feels comfortable. Take four more deep breaths using the same procedure.
- C. Suspend a pencil by its point over a desk or table or the floor. Tell yourself that when you are deeply relaxed the pencil will drop. The sound of the dropping pencil will be your signal to enter a healing, five-minute trance. (If you wish to omit the pencil, proceed with step C from here.) Close your eyes and say to yourself the key word or phrase that you have learned in self-hypnosis. Tell yourself that you will become more and more relaxed with each number as you count backwards from ten to zero. After the countdown, repeat to yourself these four phrases, over and over, in any order: "I am drifting deeper and deeper, deeper and deeper . . . I am more and more drowsy, peaceful, and calm . . . I am drifting and drowsy, drowsy and drifting . . . I am drifting down, down, down, into total relaxation." If your pencil has not already dropped by this time, let it go deliberately and remind yourself that you will now enjoy five minutes of peaceful self-hypnosis.
- D. While in trance, visit your special place and enjoy the uniquely relaxing qualities of that environment. Really experience the sights, sounds, and sensations of your special place. When it feels that you've been there long enough, count back from one to ten. Suggest that you are becoming more and more alert, refreshed, and wide awake as you count up.

2. *Autogenic Breathing*

- A. Begin by taking slow, deep breaths as described in 1B. Become aware of the growing feeling of relaxation as each deep breath expands your diaphragm.
- B. Visualize a beach. See the waves rolling up the sand, the seagulls wheeling overhead, a few puffs of fleecy clouds. Hear the roar of waves, and then the quiet. Hear the

alternating roar, quiet, roar, quiet. Over the ocean sound you can hear the seagulls calling. Now feel the warm sand. Imagine it covering your body, warm and heavy. Really feel the weight of the sand on your arms and legs. Feel surrounded by warmth and comfort.

- C. While visualizing the sand, continue to breathe as deeply as feels comfortable. Notice the rhythm of your breath. As you breathe in, say the word "warm" to yourself. Try to feel the warmth of the sand around your body. As you breathe out, say the word "heavy." Experience the weight of the sand on your limbs. Continue your deep breathing, thinking "warm" as you inhale and "heavy" as you exhale. Continue for at least five minutes. (Note: If after a time you feel more comfortable shifting to shallower breathing, let yourself do so.)

3. *Stop and Breathe*

- A. Whenever you notice disturbing or anxiety-provoking thoughts, internally shout "stop" to yourself (see chapter 13 on "Thought Stopping"). Imagine hearing a voice with a great deal of sharpness and authority. If shouting "stop" to yourself doesn't interrupt the flow of thoughts, put a rubber band around your wrist and snap it as you shout "stop."
- B. Shift your attention to your breathing. Begin taking slow, deep breaths into your belly. Place a hand over your abdomen to make sure it is expanding with each breath.
- C. Now start counting your breaths. As you exhale, count one. As you exhale again, count two. Keep counting up to four. Each time you reach four, start over again at one. Try to keep your mind as empty as possible as you focus on counting each breath. Continue the procedure until you feel relaxed and repeat each time anxiety-provoking thoughts occur.

4. *Changing Channels*

- A. Use the same thought-stopping procedure described in 3A above.
- B. As soon as you have interrupted the stressful cognition, use a prerehearsed visualization to block the return of any unwanted thoughts. Make sure the visualization is something you can elicit easily without struggle. Use an exciting sexual fantasy, images of success from some important achievement, scenes from an anticipated vacation, or images of your special place. The common thread of all these suggestions is to see yourself doing something that feels really good, something you picture easily. (Helpful hint: try visualizing scenes you already use for daydreaming.)
- C. If visualization doesn't work, try these alternatives: turn on the radio, put a favorite tape in your Walkman, go out for a jog or some other strenuous aerobic exercise, start counting things (each Chevrolet you see, each person wearing a hat, how many families have children on your block), pick up a book or magazine, even sing or

whistle. What matters is that the activity be arresting enough to divert attention away from stressful thoughts for a time.

- D. Use a coping mantra. This is a reminder that you're basically safe and okay and can handle any stress that comes along. Some coping mantras are general affirmations such as "I am well ... I am safe and calm ... I trust my ability to cope ... I am surrounded by support and love ... I can relax my body and my mind ... I can plan and decide later, now I'll relax." Other mantras require the development of a coping statement about a specific situation: "These are just stomach cramps and I'm not going to worry about them ... Tests show my heart is strong and healthy ... This is the same old neck pain, it always passes ... I can always get a loan ... I can set limits, I'll just tell her no ... I can ask for help with _____ ... I can make mistakes ... I don't have to finish everything on time ... I can disappoint _____ sometimes and we'll still love one another ... I have a plan I can implement tomorrow ... These are just fight or flight symptoms, they'll pass soon ... I did the best I could, we'll see what happens." Use your coping mantra whenever the stressful thought threatens to take hold again. Repeat your mantra as often as necessary.

5. I Am Grateful

This exercise is particularly helpful as the day is wearing on and your sense of stress and frustration is rising. It is also an excellent sequence for relaxing and putting yourself in a pleasant frame of mind before you drift off to sleep.

- A. Use the short form for progressive muscle relaxation outlined in the progressive relaxation chapter. (1. Curl fists, tighten biceps. 2. Wrinkle forehead, face like a walnut. 3. Arch back, take a deep breath. 4. Pull feet back, curl toes while tightening calves, thighs, buttocks.)
- B. Reflect back over your day so far and select three things for which you feel grateful. These do not have to be major events. For example, you may be grateful for the warm shower you took this morning, a co-worker helping you, your child giving you a hug and telling you he loves you, a lovely sunrise, and so on. Take a moment to relive and enjoy these experiences.
- C. Continue to think back over your day. Recall three things you did that you feel good about. Remember, these don't have to be major feats. For example, you may feel good about saying no to something you really didn't want to do, taking time for yourself to exercise or relax, or being supportive to someone you like. Take a moment to reexperience those positive moments.

6. Deep Affirmation

- A. Put your hand over your abdomen and begin taking slow deep breaths as described in 1B.

B. Close your eyes and continue to breathe deeply as you scan your body for tension. Start with your toes and move up your body. Notice any tension in your calves, thighs, and buttocks. Explore areas of tension in your back, abdomen, or chest muscles. Notice your shoulders and neck, your jaw, cheeks, and forehead. Check for tension in your biceps, forearms, and hands. Whenever you discover a tense area, exaggerate the tension slightly so that you can become aware of it. Notice exactly which muscles in your body are tense and then say to yourself, "I am tensing my _____ . . . I am hurting myself . . . I am creating tension in my body . . . I will let go of that tension starting now."

C. Use the self-hypnosis exercise outlined in 1C.

D. Select an affirmation to use while in trance. The following is a list of suggested affirmations reprinted from *Visualization for Change* by Patrick Fanning.

I can relax at will.

Tension is draining from my muscles.

I'm filled with peace, calm, and serenity.

I can turn my tension down like the volume on a radio.

Relaxation floods my body like healing, golden light.

I am in touch with my peaceful center.

I can look inward and find peace.

Relaxation is always within my grasp.

When you have relaxed long enough, count back up from one to ten. Suggest as you count that you are feeling more and more refreshed, alert, and wide awake.

7. The Tension Cutter

A. Take four deep breaths as described in 1B.

B. Close your eyes. Visualize your tension by giving it a color or a shape. Now change the shape and color of your tension. Make it bigger or smaller, lighter or darker. Now see yourself picking it up. Look at it in your hands, toss it up and down once or twice like it was a ball. Now see yourself rearing back in slow motion to throw your tension away. Go ahead and throw it. See it slowly leave your hand and move further and further away. Watch until it disappears out of your awareness.

C. Now imagine your body filled with lights. See red lights for tension and blue lights for relaxation. Imagine the lights changing from red to blue in all the tension areas of your body. Be aware of any physical sensation you experience while you change to the blue light of relaxation. See all the lights in your body as blue and see that color blue becoming darker and darker. Feel yourself relaxing further with each shade of blue you experience.

D. Now it's time for a mini-vacation. Here are two itineraries.

Vacation 1. Picture yourself in a forest. The light is bright in places and mottled in others. You feel safe and comfortable, taking a long pleasant walk. The air around you

is cool and refreshing. You enjoy the bright spots of sunshine on the ground where the sun has filtered down through the leaves. You are walking barefoot. The leaves and moss feel soft and cool on your feet. You hear the bird sounds and the soft rustle of wind through the trees. The sounds make you happy and comfortable. As you walk your muscles feel more and more loose, heavy, and relaxed. The forest carpet of leaves and moss feels so comfortable that you want to lie down and close your eyes to rest. Now you see a small stream making a soft, bubbly noise. And next to the stream is a patch of tall, soft grass, lit and warmed by sunlight. It's a lovely place to rest and you sink down to your knees and roll gently over onto the soft, warm grass. You hear the bubbling stream, the birds' song, and the gentle wind. You are so deeply relaxed that every part of your body from your toes to the top of your head is loose and heavy.

Vacation 2. Picture yourself alone in a beach house with a view of the sea. The first rays of sun light up the wall of your bedroom as you sink deeper into the warm, soft bed. You take a deep breath and notice how relaxed your muscles are. Outside you hear the sounds of seagulls and the rhythmic crashing of the waves. The waves roll in and out, in and out. Each wave makes you more and more deeply relaxed. In and out, in and out. Drowsy, heavy and calm. You can feel the cool salt air coming through the open window and you roll over to see the sand and the waves and the blue sky. You take deep breaths of the air and the relaxation deepens with each breath. You feel safe and yet very free, unhurried, aware that the day ahead is full of possibilities.

Use these examples as a model to create your own mini-vacations.

8. *Breath Counting*

- A. Preselect a brief affirmation (see the list in 6D) or coping mantra (see the list in 4D). Try to make sure that the affirmation or coping reminder is no longer than seven or eight words. Make up a statement that feels right for you and your unique situation.
- B. To begin the relaxation process, use the short form of progressive muscle relaxation found in 5A and the progressive relaxation chapter.
- C. Take four deep breaths as described in 1B.
- D. Now let your breathing go back to a normal rate. Focus on each breath, and as you exhale count the breath. When you get to the fourth breath, instead of counting four, say your affirmation or coping mantra. Here's a sample of what you might do. As you exhale you count one, two, three, "I can make mistakes and be okay," one, two, three, "I can make mistakes and be okay," and so on.

9. *Taking Control*

- A. Get comfortable, close your eyes, and begin noticing your breathing. Try to notice each breath and nothing else. As you exhale, say to yourself the word "one." Keep saying "one" with each exhalation.

- B. When you feel sufficiently relaxed, turn your attention from your breathing to a situation you find stressful or difficult. See yourself handling that stressful situation successfully, confidently. See yourself saying and doing the appropriate thing to succeed. See yourself smiling, standing or sitting erectly. Now visualize yourself hesitating or making a small error, uncertain for a moment. But then you go on, confidently finishing the task, looking satisfied. You remind yourself, "I can handle this, I'm in control."

10. *Accepting Yourself*

- A. Use the body scanning procedure described in 6B.
- B. Continue to relax by doing several minutes of autogenic breathing as described in 2C.
- C. When you feel deeply relaxed, make these suggestions to yourself: "I let go of shoulds . . . I accept myself for all my humanness . . . I breathe, I feel, I do the best I can." Rewrite this mantra in any way that feels more authentic or true for you. Anything will work, as long as it carries the basic message that you accept yourself.

The Seven Pillars of Mindfulness:

(From Full Catastrophe Living, By Jon Kabat-Zinn)

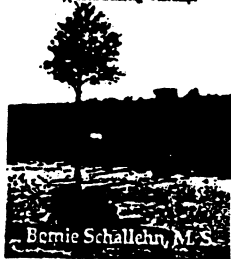
1. **Non-Judging.** Become an impartial witness to your own experience. Learn how your mechanical reactions and thoughts dominate your mind. By realizing how categorizations become prejudices and fears, we can be released from their tyranny.
2. **Patience.** Things must unfold in their own time and rhythm. Why rush through some moments to get to better ones yet to come? Our lives are made up of moments. Each one is a moment in your life. And this moment is all any of us has.
3. **Beginners Mind.** Open your mind and be willing to see everything as if for the first time. Grasp the extra ordinariness of the ordinary. See with fresh eyes. Pay attention to your senses: listen/ hear; look/ see; inhale/ smell; taste/ savor; touch, feel. Ask the question: "Who am I?"

Trust. Develop a basic trust in yourself. Trust your basic wisdom, goodness, and rhythm. Trust your living of your life. Take responsibility for being yourself. You have to live your own life, every moment.
5. **Non-Striving.** Learn to do "non-doing". Simply pay attention to what is happening, whatever it is. Meditation is an acceptance of the "isness" of the moment. It is not about doing anything you are just perfect as you are now. There is no need to feel a lack of even "being enlightened."
6. **Acceptance.** See things as they actually are in the present. Now is the only time you have for anything. Before you can change anything, you must first accept it as it is now.
7. **Letting Go.** In meditation practice saying "let go." We observe our minds grasping and pushing and attempting to hold onto judgments. "This is good. This is bad." Attempting to make the world fit the pattern we think it should be. Letting go of these judgments frees us, allows open space for our lives to happen.

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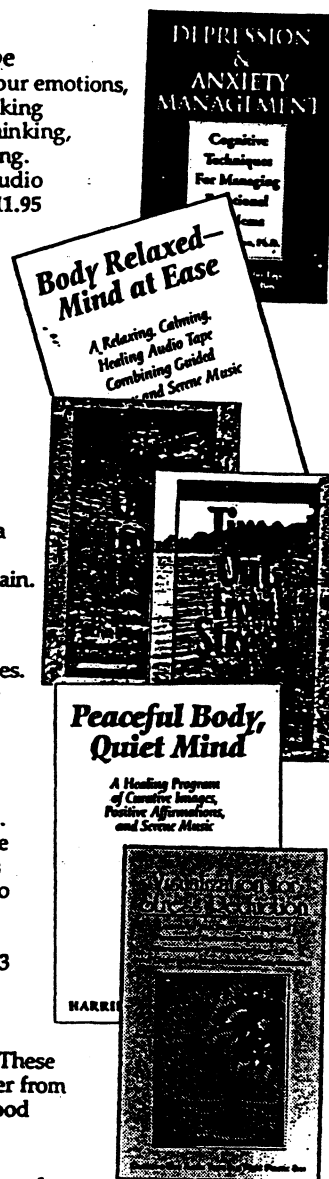
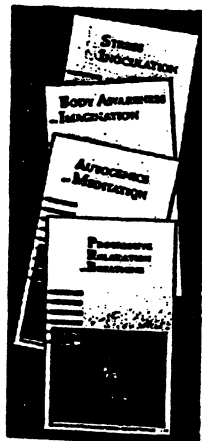
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Seven Mini Relaxations

1. **Neck and shoulders release:** Take a deep breath in and bring your attention to your head, neck and shoulders; hold, then exhale gently. Breathe in again and gently raise your shoulders toward your ears. As you breathe out, imagine all the tension in your neck, shoulders and back leaving through this breath. Allow your shoulders to drop slightly with your exhale. Repeat.
2. **Counting the breath:** Inhale to the count of six, taking a slow, deep breath. Hold...then, breathe out, slowly, to the count of six, repeat. Breathe in and out through your nose.
3. **Cleansing breath:** Step 1: Inhale slowly through your nose to the count of six, exhale through your mouth, and as you exhale, blow as if you are ever-so-slowly blowing out a candle, so it flickers but doesn't go out. Repeat. Step 2: Inhale slowly through your nose to a count of six; then exhale through your mouth, strongly blowing out the imaginary candle, blowing out as much held tension as you can.
4. **Body scan:** Using your mind, take an inventory of your body, moving your attention slowly from your head to your feet in a wave. Notice any areas of tightness or tension. As you exhale, allow the areas of tension or pain to soften and release. Inhale and repeat.
5. **Tense, hold, release:** Breathe in and tense all the muscles you can at once. Hold your breath, then slowly breathe out, letting all the tension go. Repeat this several times. *NOTE: This exercise is not recommended for fibromyalgia patients, or other chronic musculoskeletal pain.*
6. **Relaxing sigh:** Sit or stand up straight. Breathe in, and hold. Exhale, sighing deeply; exaggerate the "Sigh of Relief" as the air rushes from your body: "Ahhhhh...." Repeat.
7. **Four step quieting reflex:** Step 1: Notice what is upsetting you. Step 2: Repeat a calming affirmation to yourself: "Alert mind. Calm body." Step 3: Smile inwardly to soften your face and jaw tension. Step 4: Inhale slowly to a count of three, imagining the breath coming in through the bottom of your feet. Exhale slowly, and allow your jaw, tongue and shoulder muscles to go limp.

EMOTION REGULATION HANDOUT 9

Letting Go of Emotional Suffering: Mindfulness of Your Current Emotion

OBSERVE YOUR EMOTION

- NOTE its presence.
- Step BACK.
- Get UNSTUCK from the emotion.

EXPERIENCE YOUR EMOTION

- As a WAVE, coming and going.
- Try not to BLOCK emotion.
- Try not to SUPPRESS emotion.
- Don't try to GET RID of emotion.
- Don't PUSH it away.
- Don't try to KEEP emotion around.
- Don't HOLD ON to it.
- Don't AMPLIFY it.

REMEMBER: YOU ARE NOT YOUR EMOTION

- Do not necessarily ACT on emotion.
- Remember times when you have felt DIFFERENT.

PRACTICE LOVING YOUR EMOTION

- Don't JUDGE your emotion.
- Practice WILLINGNESS.
- Radically ACCEPT your emotion.

APPENDIX III TAPES AND BOOKS FOR HEALTH MANAGEMENT

Tapes

Guided Relaxations/Imageries

- *Letting Go of Stress*—Emmett Miller
 - *Images for Optimal Health*—Emmett Miller
 - *Change the Channel on Pain*—Emmett Miller
 - *Headache Relief*—Emmett Miller
 - *Healing Journey*—Emmett Miller
 - *Positive Imagery for People with Cancer*—Emmett Miller
- Available from: Source, P.O. Box W, Stanford, CA 94309
(415) 328-7171 or (800) 52-TAPES

- *Seasons for Healing—Stress & Pain Management*—Jule Scotti Post (Vol. I—Winter-Spring; Vol. II—Summer-Fall)

Available from: Healing Imagery, 4520 Kingscup Court, Ellicott City, MD 21042

- *Health Journeys*—Belleruth Naparstek
Cancer Chemotherapy Depression
Grief General wellness

Available from: Image Paths, Inc., P.O. Box 5714, Cleveland, OH 44101

- *Cancer—Discovering Your Healing Power*—Louis Hay
- Available from: Hay House, Inc., Santa Monica, CA
(213) 394-7445

- *Rapid Pain Control*—Carol Erickson and Thomas Condon
 - *Self-Hypnosis for Reducing Your Stress*—Carol Erickson
- Available from: Changeworks, P.O. Box 4000-D, Berkeley, CA 94706

Relaxation Music

- *Zen Waterfall*—Eliotoshu & Paul L. Warner, Global Pacific Distributions
- *Caverna Magica*—Andreas Vollenweider, CBS Records
- *White Winds*—Andreas Vollenweider, CBS Records
- *The Sky of the Mind*—Andreas Vollenweider, CBS Records
- *Comfort Zone*—Steve Halpern, Halpern Sounds
- *Spectrum Suite*—Steve Halpern, Halpern Sounds
- *Winter Solstice*—David Lanz & Michael Jones, Narada Productions
- *Pianoscapas*—Michael Jones
- *Petals*—Marcus Allen et al., Dreamwater Music
- *Harp & Soul*—Georgia Kelly, Heru Records
- *Path of Joy*—Daniel Kobialka, Li-Sem Enterprises
- *Silk Road*—Kitaro, Sound Design

- *Silver Road*—Kitaro, Sound Design
- *Silver Cloud*—Kitaro, Sound Design
- *Toward the West*—Kitaro, Sound Design
- *Silver Wings*—Mike Rowland, Music Design, Inc.
- *Fairy Ring*—Mike Rowland, Music Design, Inc.
- *Lovely Day*—William Aura, Higher Octave Music
- *Miracles*—Rob Whitesides-Woo, Search for Serenity
- *Mountain Light*—Rob Whitesides-Woo, Search for Serenity

Classical Music for Relaxation

- *Classic Fantasy*—Anugama, Higher Octave Music
- *Relax with the Classics, Vol. I-IV*—Lind Institute
- *Great Lakes Suite*—Dan Gibson
- *The Classics*—Dan Gibson

Books

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Mindful Practice

Ronald M. Epstein, MD

REFLECTION AND SELF-AWARENESS help physicians to examine belief systems and values, deal with strong feelings, make difficult decisions, and resolve interpersonal conflict.^{1,2} Organized activities to foster self-awareness are part of many family medicine residency programs³ and some other residency^{4,5} and medical school curricula.⁵⁻⁸ Exemplary physicians seem to have a capacity for critical self-reflection that pervades all aspects of practice, including being present with the patient,⁹ solving problems, eliciting and transmitting information, making evidence-based decisions, performing technical skills, and defining their own values.¹⁰

This process of critical self-reflection depends on the presence of mindfulness. A mindful practitioner attends, in a nonjudgmental way, to his or her own physical and mental processes during ordinary everyday tasks to act with clarity and insight.¹¹⁻¹⁵ This article first describes the nature of professional knowledge, competence, and values and then presents current thinking about the philosophical, psychological, and practical aspects of mindfulness. It also explores how mindfulness is integral to the professional competence of physicians and suggests ways to cultivate mindfulness in medical training. In doing so, however, I recognize that *mindful practice*, although supported by empiric observation of clinical practice,¹⁶⁻²¹ educational research,²²⁻²⁶ philosophy,^{11,27} and cognitive science,^{11,28-30} is fundamentally personal and subjective.

See also pp 830 and 881.

Mindful practitioners attend in a nonjudgmental way to their own physical and mental processes during ordinary, everyday tasks. This critical self-reflection enables physicians to listen attentively to patients' distress, recognize their own errors, refine their technical skills, make evidence-based decisions, and clarify their values so that they can act with compassion, technical competence, presence, and insight. Mindfulness informs all types of professionally relevant knowledge, including propositional facts, personal experiences, processes, and know-how, each of which may be tacit or explicit. Explicit knowledge is readily taught, accessible to awareness, quantifiable and easily translated into evidence-based guidelines. Tacit knowledge is usually learned during observation and practice, includes prior experiences, theories-in-action, and deeply held values, and is usually applied more inductively. Mindful practitioners use a variety of means to enhance their ability to engage in moment-to-moment self-monitoring, bring to consciousness their tacit personal knowledge and deeply held values, use peripheral vision and subsidiary awareness to become aware of new information and perspectives, and adopt curiosity in both ordinary and novel situations. In contrast, mindlessness may account for some deviations from professionalism and errors in judgment and technique. Although mindfulness cannot be taught explicitly, it can be modeled by mentors and cultivated in learners. As a link between relationship-centered care and evidence-based medicine, mindfulness should be considered a characteristic of good clinical practice.

JAMA. 1999;282:833-839

www.jama.com

Consider a situation that I recently faced with a patient who required an expanded view of professional knowledge and mindful reflection to achieve a satisfactory resolution. A 42-year-old mother of 2 small girls, despondent over job difficulties, was contemplating genetic screening for breast cancer as she approached the age at which her mother was diagnosed as having the same disease. Aside from the difficulties in taking an evidence-based approach to assigning quantitative risks and benefits to the genetic screening procedure (How much should I trust the available information?) and uncertainty about the effectiveness of medical or surgical interventions (Would knowing the results make a difference, and, if so, to whom?), the case raised important relationship-

centered questions about values (What risks are worth taking?), the patient-physician relationship (What approach would be most helpful to the patient?), pragmatics (Is the geneticist competent and respectful?), and capacity (To what extent is the patient's desire for testing biased by her fears, depression, or incomplete understanding of the illness and tests?).

For me, book knowledge and clinical experience were insufficient. I had to rely on my personal knowledge of the

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Table 1. Professionally Relevant Awareness and Knowledge

Levels of Awareness	
Tacit (subsidiary awareness)	
Explicit (focal awareness)	
Types of Knowledge	
Propositional - facts	
Personal - experience	
Process (including metaprocessing)	
Know-how	

patient (Is she responding to this situation in a way concordant with her previous actions and values?) and myself (What values and biases affect the way I frame this situation for myself and for the patient?) to help us arrive at a mutual decision. These reflective activities applied equally to the technical aspects of medicine (How do I know I can trust the interpretations of medical tests?) and the affective domain (How well can I tolerate uncertainty and risk?). An attitude of critical curiosity,³¹ openness, and connection^{17,32,33} allowed us to defer the decision and reconsider testing once the immediate crises had passed.

Explicit and Tacit Knowledge

Clinical judgment is based on both explicit and tacit knowledge.³⁴⁻³⁶ Medical decision making, however, is often presented only as the conscious application to the patient's problem of explicitly defined rules and objectively verifiable data.^{34,37,38} This form of explicit knowledge can be quantified, modeled, readily communicated, and easily translated into evidence-based clinical practice guidelines.

Seasoned practitioners also apply to their practice a large body of knowledge, skills, values, and experiences that are not explicitly stated by or known to them.³⁴ This knowledge may constitute a different kind of evidence, which also has a strong influence on medical decisions. In everyday life, examples of tacit knowledge abound. Riding a bicycle involves judgments about speed, orientation, and position that are rarely made conscious except when something goes amiss. Similarly, an experienced neurologist can recognize Parkinson dis-

ease within moments of meeting a patient, before processing the objective and subjective data to support it. During this preattentive processing,³⁹ the brain rapidly scans a wide array of perceptions, detects conspicuous features, and relegates some information to the background, all before the content of the perception is analyzed. Clinical skills, such as the depth of insertion of an otoscope, the manipulation of the fetal head during a delivery, and the realization that the patient has given sufficient information to diagnose major depression involve tacit knowledge and preattentive processing.

While explicit elements of practice are taught formally, tacit elements are usually learned during observation and practice.⁴⁰ Often, excellent clinicians are less able to articulate what they do than others who observe them. Nor do they appreciate all of the biases in their own reasoning processes.⁴¹ *Subsidiary awareness*³⁵ is a term that describes how the practitioner makes accessible the flow of unprocessed experience and tacit knowledge.

In the words of Anaïs Nin, "We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are."⁴² Evidence-based medicine offers a structure for analyzing medical decision making, but it is not sufficient to describe the more tacit process of expert clinical judgment.⁴³ All data, regardless of their completeness or accuracy, are interpreted by the clinician to make sense of them and apply them to clinical practice.⁴⁴ Experts take into account messy details, such as context, cost, convenience, and the values of the patient.^{36,43,45,46} Physician factors such as emotions,⁴⁷ bias,⁴⁸ prejudice,⁴⁹ risk-aversion,⁵⁰⁻⁵³ tolerance for uncertainty,^{54,55} and personal knowledge of the patient also influence clinical judgment.⁵⁰⁻⁵⁵ Most of the processes described above remain relatively unconscious to the practitioner.

Clinical judgment is a science and an art.³⁶ Even those who are uncomfortable with the notion of tacit knowledge recognize that it is impossible to make explicit all aspects of professional competence.⁴³ Evidence-based

decision models are very powerful tools, but clinicians do not always use them especially in complex situations.^{30,56} Information necessary to construct explicit models is frequently incomplete or conflicting. Some important tacit knowledge about the patient, such as personality, simply does not fit into predefined categories. To clinicians, these models may resemble computer-generated symphonies in the style of Mozart—correct but lifeless.

Professional Knowledge and Self-awareness

Eraut^{57,58} defines 4 types of professionally relevant knowledge, each of which can be tacit or explicit (TABLE 1). The most familiar is propositional knowledge, or what most people call fact: theories, concepts, and principles, usually acquired from books, electronic media, or instructors. Self-awareness of what one does not know and the appreciation for the transient nature of facts can direct ongoing learning.

Knowledge acquired through experience, or personal knowledge, is a collection of information, intuitions, and interpretations that guides professional practice.³⁵ Consider the following example. Returning from vacation, I saw one of my patients who was infected with human immunodeficiency virus and said to the resident caring for him, "Mr Charles looks worse. Looks like he might have adrenal insufficiency." The personal knowledge exemplified in this scenario differs from an anecdote because it is contextualized. I can say that Mr Charles looks worse because I know him as a person, not just because I know about him, and because I recognize a pattern of disease (weakness and skin color change). This knowledge enters into my mind in an inductive, impressionistic way, providing the gestalt or feel of a clinical situation in addition to the propositional facts.²⁹ However, confusion between personal knowledge and anecdotal information results in both being neglected and discounted during medical training. An example of the uncritical application of a decontextualized anecdote is when a physician who after

missing a diagnosis of colon cancer, subsequently overtests all of his patients. In contrast, if he had raised tacit personal knowledge to awareness, it could have been subjected to critical reflection.

Process knowledge is knowing how to accomplish a task,⁵⁹ such as gathering information, performing procedures, making decisions, and planning for the future.⁵⁸ Process knowledge also includes metaprocessing, or the process of reflection on one's own mental processes. This is particularly important in practice, because "we do not observe nature as much as we observe nature exposed to our method of questioning."⁶⁰ Metaprocessing might be called thinking about thinking or feeling about feelings. It is both a concrete action (such as the modification in a trajectory of light in a mirror) and an act of self-observation in which the mind attends to its own actions (including the subject who is performing those actions). Metaprocessing allows the physician to uncover areas of unconscious incompetence,⁶¹ the blind spots wherein a physician might not know his or her deficiencies. Fortunately, clinicians can often readily identify these blind spots and gain insight into the influence of the observer, for example, when they review their own videotaped patient visits.^{62,63}

Eraut's fourth type of professionally relevant knowledge, know-how, is knowing how to get things done. A resident working in a new setting may know that a diagnostic test is important, but may not know that the test will happen sooner with a friendly call to the radiologist. Learning the steps necessary for getting something done is important in professional development of physicians, but it is often relegated to the informal⁶⁴ or hidden^{24,26} curriculum.

Mindful Practice

Mindfulness is a logical extension of the concept of reflective practice.^{4,12,14} The mindful practitioner is present in everyday experience, in all of its manifestations, including actions, thoughts, sensations, images, interpretations, and emotions.^{12,13,65} Mindfulness "leads the

mind back from theories, attitudes and abstractions . . . to the situation of experience itself,"¹¹ which prevents us from "falling prey to our own prejudices, opinions, projections, expectations" and enables us to free ourselves from the "straightjacket of unconsciousness."⁶⁶ Mindfulness is attending to the ordinary, the obvious, and the present. Johann Sebastian Bach is reported to have said, when asked how he found melodies: "The problem is not finding them, it's—when getting up in the morning and out of bed—not stepping on them."⁶⁷

Although mindfulness is a practice that derives from a philosophical-religious tradition,^{12,14,15} the underlying philosophy is fundamentally pragmatic¹³ and is based on the interdependence of action, cognition, memory, and emotion. These connections represent a relatively new idea in neuroscience research.^{28,68} Western approaches to the understanding of mental processes have historically separated mental activity from action in the world, and the schism between behavioral and psychodynamic psychology has reinforced some of this separation. However, in the East,^{11,14} and in phenomenological traditions in the West,²⁷ philosophy has linked cognition to emotion, memory, and action in the world.

The goals of mindful practice are to become more aware of one's own mental processes, listen more attentively, become flexible, and recognize bias and judgments, and thereby act with principles and compassion (TABLE 2). Mindful practice involves a sense of "unfinishedness,"³¹ curiosity about the unknown and humility in having an imperfect understanding of another's suffering. Mindfulness is the opposite of multitasking. Mindfulness is a quality of the physician as person, without boundaries between technical, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual aspects of practice.

Mindful practitioners have an ability to observe the observed while observing the observer in the consulting room. This process, not often discussed in medical practice, is considered essential to musicians, whose task is to perform and listen at the same time,

Table 2. Characteristics of Mindful Practice

Active observation of oneself, the patient, and the problem
Peripheral vision
Preattentive processing
Critical curiosity
Courage to see the world as it is rather than as one would have it be
Willingness to examine and set aside categories and prejudices
Adoption of a beginner's mind
Humility to tolerate awareness of one's areas of incompetence
Connection between the knower and the known
Compassion based on insight
Presence

attending simultaneously to the technical challenges, emotional expression, and overall theoretical structure of the music.⁶⁹ The accomplished musician performs midcourse corrections of finger movements, compares the sound produced with the imagined sound, and, at the same time, brings expressive spontaneity to the performance. However, if the musician were to attempt to control each finger movement while simultaneously analyzing the harmonic structures, rhythms, and silences that constitute expressive playing, playing would become impossible. Thus, focal awareness on the music is accompanied by subsidiary awareness³⁵ of technique and analysis—a mix of peripheral vision and semiautomatic action that is highlighted only when the unexpected or difficult occurs.

In medicine, consider what a resident in a busy pediatric emergency department might do when he is unable to determine whether an ear examination is normal or abnormal and the attending physician is not immediately available. The resident has several options, consideration of which could be conscious or unconscious. The resident weighs the consequences of misdiagnosis for the patient, the humiliation of having to call an otolaryngology resident out of the clinic, the loss of self-esteem by having to admit incompetence, and the pride in being strong enough to admit his need to learn. An unmindful practitioner who is conscious of the dilemma might judge or blame himself or others. He might base

his course of action on an external standard of correctness or on expedience. However, little would be learned, and he would be no better prepared for the next situation. A mindful conscious approach would be to cultivate awareness not only of the correct course of action but also of the factors that cloud the decision-making process. The mindful practitioner is mentally and technically better prepared for the next situation.

The object of mindfulness can apply to any aspect of medical practice and within any domain of tacit or explicit knowledge. Intrapersonal self-awareness helps the physician be conscious of his or her strengths, limitations, and sources of professional satisfaction. It helps the individual avoid blind spots, such as a physician who, because his or her parent was an alcoholic, avoids discussions of alcohol with patients. It may clarify deeply held values and motivations for becoming a physician. Interpersonal self-awareness, or social intelligence,^{70,71} allows physicians to see themselves as they are seen by others and helps to establish satisfactory interpersonal relationships with colleagues, patients, and students. Awareness of metaprocessing allows physicians to be aware of their own clinical reasoning, including the necessary connections between cognition, memory, and emotional processing.²⁸ Self-awareness of learning needs allows physicians to recognize areas of unconscious incompetence and to develop a means to achieving their learning goals.⁶¹ Ethical self-awareness is the moment-to-moment cognizance of values that are shaping medical encounters. Technical self-awareness is necessary for self-correction during procedures such as the physical examination, surgery, computer operations, and communication.

Often reflection is prompted by a critical incident involving an error, a difficult situation, or an unexpected result of one's actions.^{25,72,73} At other times, reflection is prompted by the maturing of an idea rather than by a discrete external event. However, many of these events go unnoticed by all but the most creative thinkers. The discoveries of peni-

cillin, radiation, and the benzene ring were not accidents, but rather the result of someone making what had been considered an outlier (a tainted Petri dish) into data (a useful medication).

Mindfulness enables the practitioner to use a wider set of perceptual resources. The fluidity of mind that can maintain some constant subthreshold awareness of preattentive and subsidiary processes has been described as a "beginner's mind."¹² A beginner's mind is open and allows for new diagnostic and therapeutic possibilities, as may happen when a patient meets a new physician. By contrast, the expert's mind narrows possibilities, using prior experience to delimit and confine observations. Langer¹³ describes mindfulness as a state of "could be," welcoming uncertainty rather than trying to avoid it. Difficult patients might then become interesting patients; unsolvable problems might become avenues for research. Critical curiosity shows the limits of categories and helps create more meaningful ones. For example, the recognition of panic disorder as a common cause of chest pain might help physicians recategorize these patients from symptom amplifiers⁷⁴ to patients with a serious and treatable illness. Expertise is often well served by beginner's mind, especially in new, unfamiliar, or stressful situations.

Mindfulness implies examining the relationship between the knower and the known as suggested in the "I-Thou" relationship of Martin Buber⁷⁵ or the "connected knowing" of ideas, people or things, suggested by Belenky and colleagues.³³ Knowledge, then, does not exist independently but rather in relationship to the one observing and using it. Theories are seen as fragile approximations rather than reality itself.⁷⁶ Suchman and Matthews¹⁷ have described this as the *connexional* dimension of medical practice, in which there is a tacit bond between patient and physician that transcends professional roles.

Mindlessness: Gaps Between Knowledge, Values, and Actions

Physicians make moment-to-moment value-laden decisions that entail cog-

nitive and emotional factors. They decide how much effort to expend in pursuit of knowledge, how much pain medication to prescribe, how much time to spend with each patient, and when to return patients' telephone calls. These rapid decisions, usually based on personal knowledge, level of skill, efficiency, and values, ultimately result in actions. Thus, objectives for the practice of medicine calling on physicians should include the ability to perform or knowledge about important aspects of medical care⁷⁷ as well as the requirement to actually use those practices in daily work.

Self-knowledge is essential to the expression of core values in medicine, such as empathy, compassion, and altruism. To be empathic, I must witness and understand the patient's suffering and my reactions to the patient's suffering to distinguish the patient's experience from my own. Then I can communicate my understanding and be compassionate, to use my presence to relieve suffering and to put the patient's interests first. Perhaps lack of self-awareness is why physicians more often espouse these values than demonstrate them⁷⁸⁻⁸¹ and why they tend to be less patient-centered⁸² and confuse their own perspectives with those of the patient^{1,80} in situations that involve conflict and strong emotions.

Curiosity is central both to caring about the patient and to solving problems.⁸³ Fitzgerald¹⁶ describes a trainee who reported a patient as having had a history of "BKA" (below-the-knee amputation) without noting that the patient, in fact, had both feet. A transcriptionist had mistranscribed DKA (diabetic ketoacidosis) and the assertion went unchallenged. The student's lack of curiosity, or overconcreteness, led to mistaking the chart for the patient. Similarly, caring requires an interest in the patient as a person rather than as an abstraction of disease.^{84,85} For example, Stetten¹⁸ described how his physicians were uninterested in his adaptation to blindness while they attempted to treat his macular degeneration; they saw the disease but not the person.

Mindlessness accounts for many deviations from professionalism, which seem to occur more often in emotionally charged situations, during situations of uncertainty, and under pressure to resolve problems. For example, many medical students and residents, and presumably practitioners as well, report findings that were not observed and do not seek correction for errors.²⁰ Actions diverge from professional knowledge and values because of attempts to be efficient, a desire to please supervisors, feelings of embarrassment, and a sense of being overwhelmed.^{2,19,21,82,86,87} Practitioners may not think to apply knowledge gained in a classroom context (such as an ethics course) in a stressful clinical environment. Deviations often involve avoidance of difficult issues, rationalization, externalization, or frank denial rather than the healthy processing of emotional feelings toward patients.^{88,89}

Levels of Mindful Practice

To guide physicians' professional development, I would like to propose 5 levels of mindfulness, each of which subsumes the previous level and is subject to verification in future observational studies (TABLE 3). At the extreme of mindless practice, the practitioner's response is denial (level 0). By making the problem "out there," the practitioner may avoid responsibility and reflection or describe the situation (or the patient) in ways that are contrary to the evidence.

Level 1 describes practitioners who do not necessarily use reflection but take some responsibility for the situation and solve it by conforming to an external standard of behavior. For example, a practitioner might deal with his attraction to a patient by reciting a rule, such as "sexual intimacy with patients is wrong," but may not seek understanding of the factors that put physicians at risk for misconduct.⁸⁶

Level 2 describes medical decision analysis based on the assumption that explicit cognitive models guide physician behavior and the key to change is the transfer of information. While cu-

riosity and reflection are required to generate hypotheses and important questions, physicians at this level ignore personal knowledge, tacit knowledge, and emotions. Level 3 includes curiosity about feelings, thoughts, and behaviors without attempting to suppress or label them as good or bad. By including emotions and personal knowledge, the clinician has more tools available to promote patient care. Level 4, insight, has 3 facets: understanding the nature of the problem, understanding how one attempts to solve it, and understanding the interconnectedness between the practitioner and the knowledge that he or she possesses.¹⁵ Insight facilitates the calibration of mental processes, in addition to correction of the external problem. Finally, practitioners at level 5 can use their insight to generalize, overcome similar challenges in the future, incorporate new behaviors and attitudes, express compassion, and be present.

Becoming Mindful

Recent articles^{1,5,90} have described a variety of ways for becoming more self-aware. Individually, practitioners might keep a journal, practice meditation, review videotapes of sessions with their patients, and use learning contracts. In medical education, self-evaluation forms for students and residents have been important adjuncts to the evaluation process. Learners can compare their perceptions with those of a teacher or mentor. Peer evaluations have been useful in bringing awareness to aspects of professionalism and social skills for students, residents, and practicing physicians.^{91,92} Critical incident reports written by practitioners about mistakes,^{20,93} impairment,⁹⁴ ethical dilemmas,⁹⁵ and difficult situations can be discussed in small group settings and raise awareness about common situations and one's reactions to them. Sharing of family information and cultural background, using genograms or illness narratives, can help practitioners learn about the expectations, biases, strengths, and tendencies that influence clinical care.⁹⁶⁻⁹⁹ These approaches, historically focused

Table 3. Levels of Mindfulness

Levels	Characteristics
0	Denial and externalization
1	Imitation: behavioral modeling
2	Curiosity: cognitive understanding
3	Curiosity: emotions and attitudes
4	Insight
5	Generalization, incorporation, and presence

on the emotional aspects of medical practice and the patient-physician relationship, usually consist of exercises separated in space and time from actual clinical practice. Mindfulness training goes one step further. It applies to all aspects of practice, from looking up references to performing physical examinations, from tying sutures to giving bad news.

Mindfulness can link evidence-based and relationship-centered care and help to overcome the limitations of both approaches.^{37,43,100} The success of evidence-based approaches depends on the ability of the practitioner to decide which issues require further investigation and how to frame a question. These, in turn, require that the practitioner identify his or her own biases and the influences of the patient-physician relationship on framing of the question to investigate. This personal knowledge should also be considered a form of evidence and could be integrated into decision making to incorporate patients' preferences. Evidence-based data that are not specific to one patient-physician relationship would then be applied in a more mindful way.

Seminars about difficult topics such as HIV management, delivery of bad news, medical mistakes, professionalism, and adherence to treatment can foster reflection and raise practitioners' awareness of their own emotions and biases, while, at the same time, attending to the practicalities of the patient's problem.^{101,102} However, the ability to reflect in a classroom environment is not equivalent to reflection in a stressful clinical environment. For example, ethics courses might increase students' knowledge base and improve their ability to solve difficult problems, but ethics courses do not necessarily produce physicians whose be-

havior is more ethical than it would be otherwise. Clinician-mentors can help students put ideas into action by modeling a moment-to-moment awareness of their own knowledge and emotions that inform their decisions when values are on the line. Professionals can learn to articulate their personal knowledge by observing their own actions (How do I respond to uncertainty? How do I present risks? How do I self-correct when doing a difficult technical procedure?) Professional knowledge is defined, then, not by its validity, but by how it is used.²³

There is an inherent paradox in teaching or writing about mindfulness. The teacher's task is to invoke a state of mindfulness in the learner, and, thus, the teacher can only act as a guide, not a transmitter of knowledge. In a recent example of a resident about to face a dreaded follow-up visit with an angry patient who thought that earlier treatment of his hepatitis C might have prevented his end-stage cirrhosis, the mentor's role was complex. He had to help the resident identify his feelings of guilt and defensiveness that might interfere with communicating effectively with the patient, determine the risks and benefits of liver transplantation, and explore the patient's wishes regarding end-of-life care. The mentor's approach was to help the resident identify how he psychologically prepares for each visit with a patient, a "centering" process that had been previously tacit, which usually is not explicit for most practitioners, and to use it more effectively. The mentor helped the resident observe himself, effecting a transition from unconscious incompetence to critical reflection and allowing him to come to a satisfactory decision with the patient based on both objective evidence and personal knowledge.

Barriers to mindfulness are numerous in medical training, even in reformed curricula. Fatigue, dogmatism, and an emphasis on behavior (rather than on consciousness)¹⁰³ close the mind to ideas and feelings. Unexamined negative emotions lead to emotional distance and arrogance. McWhinney identified 3 additional barriers: unexamined negative emotions, fail-

ure of imagination, and literal-mindedness (I. R. McWhinney, MD, oral presentation, London, Ontario, October 6, 1995). Failure of imagination limits the curiosity that is the first step in any process of inquiry. Concrete literal mindedness may serve simple diagnostic processes well, but impedes creative problem solving and limits the physician's view of the patient. Lack of opportunities to learn how to become mindful in practice and the lack of forums to deal with fears and anxieties create further barriers. Finally, some clinicians may fear that mindfulness is the same as excessive self-absorption that would delay necessary clinical actions. They would need to be educated that navel-gazing is antithetical to mindful practice, which has as its goal clarity and attention to the tasks at hand.

Conclusions

Mindfulness, critical reflection, learning, and patient care all "begin with the self as the first, but not the only, object of knowledge."¹⁰⁴ Mindful practice extends beyond examining the affective domains and involves critical reflection on action, tacit personal knowledge, and values in all realms of clinical practice, teaching, and research. Mindfulness is a discipline and an attitude of mind. It requires critical informed curiosity and courage to see the world as it is rather than how one would have it be. Mindful practitioners tolerate making conscious their previously unconscious actions and errors. The goal of mindfulness is compassionate informed action in the world, to use a wide array of data, make correct decisions, understand the patient, and relieve suffering.

Mindful practice requires mentoring and guidance. Recognition of one's limitations and areas of incompetence can be emotionally difficult and can invite avoidance in even highly motivated practitioners. Although mindfulness is an individual and subjective process, each of us can identify practitioners who embody these attributes, learn from them, and identify unique ways of being self-aware. Educators can take on the task of help-

ing trainees become more mindful by explicitly modeling their means for cultivating awareness.

Funding/Support: Dr Epstein received support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Generalist Physician Faculty Scholars Program and the Fulbright Foundation. **Acknowledgment:** The ideas in this article were generated during a seminar at the Institute for Health Studies, Barcelona, Spain, and also borrows generously from conversations with Jeffrey Draisin, MD, Pieter Leroux, PhD, Larry Mauksch, CSW, Maria Nolla, MD, Dennis Novack, MD. I would like to thank Arthur Frank, PhD, Cindy Haq, MD, and Ian McWhinney, MD, for their comments on early drafts of this article, and to the JAMA reviewers whose suggestions were extraordinarily thoughtful and helpful.

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